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AUTHOR Dewalt, Mark W.
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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to correct misperceptions many Americans have concerning one-room schools and Old Order Mennonite and Amish education in the United States. It was also intended to quantify the number of U.S. public and private one-room schools. The paper briefly reviews the history of Amish and Old Order Mennonite schools. Recent research has centered on the decline of public one-teacher schools in the United States but has ignored the growth of private one-room schools. In 1988 Amish and Old Order Mennonite schools comprised 41% of the one-room schools in the country and were increasing at the rate of about 15 new schools per year. Information in the study was gathered through literature review and surveys of state departments of education conducted in July and August of 1987. The study found that, as of 1987, there were 674 public and 605 private one-room schools in the United States. Eighty percent of the public one-room schools are located west of the Mississippi River. Data from the study indicate that one-room schools will be around for the foreseeable future, although the rate of reduction in the number of public one-room schools has declined since the 1950's. Tables show the following statistics: the number of one-room schools by state in 1950, 1985, 1986, and 1987; the number of public and private one-room schools by state in 1987; and the total number of one-room schools in 10 different years from 1930 to 1987. (TES)

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One-room Schools in the United States

Mark W. Dewalt
Assistant Professor of Education
Susquehanna University

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Abstract

Information for this study was gathered in two ways: a literature review and a survey of each department of education. The survey was conducted in July of 1987.

Findings: 1) As of 1987 there were 674 public and 605 private one-room schools in the United States. 2) Eighty percent of the public one-room schools are located west of the Mississippi River. 3) Eighty percent of the private one-room schools are Amish or Old Order Mennonite.

One-room Schools in the United States

The pupils who attend the 537 Amish and Old Order Mennonite one-room schools in the United States probably would find the following statement very amusing: "The Amish also believe in educating their children at home instead of sending them to schools." This statement appeared in the teachers' guide to the December 6-12, 1988 edition of Newscurrents Newspaper in Education Program, a weekly filmstrip designed to present current events to children. Statements like this are characteristic of the misunderstanding many Americans have concerning one-room schools and of Old Order Mennonite and Amish education in the United States.

This study was designed to correct these misperceptions and to quantify the number of public and private one-room schools in the United States so that educators and the public will have current and accurate information concerning these schools. To accomplish this, it is important to understand the historical context for Amish and Old Order Mennonite schools. In 1988 these schools comprised 41% of the one-room schools in the United States and are increasing at the rate of about 15 schools per year.

The Amish and Old Order Mennonite groups believe in formal education from age 6 to 16 in schools close to home. Their schools stress traditional subjects such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. Children from these homes also receive extensive

training from their parents in farming, manual skills and home economics. The belief that children should not attend school beyond age 16 has caused problems for these groups since the 1930's.

This issue was first confronted in Pennsylvania in 1937, when a large consolidated school supported by federal funds was planned for Lancaster County (Hostetler, 1980). A battle erupted in Lancaster County that involved the imprisonment of parents who would not send their children to the consolidated school and who did not want their children to attend school beyond grade eight. By 1955, a compromise was drawn up which allowed the Amish to send their children to their own vocational schools. The state also allowed children engaged in farm work to apply for a permit, upon turning 15, that would excuse them from mandatory school attendance. These rulings applied to the Mennonites as well. Plans similar to those of Pennsylvania's were adopted in Indiana and Ohio. The Amish school controversy also occurred in Iowa in the mid-1960's and was not resolved until 1967. In the same year, Maryland amended its school law to allow the Amish to operate their own schools.

It was not until 1972 that the United States Supreme Court granted the Old Order religious groups the right to limit formal education to eight grades (the Wisconsin v. Yoder case). The case was brought to court on behalf of the Old Order groups by a committee of concerned citizens. The Supreme Court held that the First and Fourteenth amendments prevented the states from compelling the Amish to attend formal high school through age 16. Chief Justice Warren Burger wrote, "Amish objection to formal

education beyond the eighth grade is firmly grounded in central religious beliefs. They object to the high school and higher education generally because the values it teaches are in marked variances with Amish values." (Wisconsin v. Yoder, 1972) This decision gave the Amish and Old Order Mennonites freedom to maintain their own schools.

Recent research has centered on the decline of public one-teacher schools in the United States, but has ignored the growth of private one-room schools. For example, the report, The One-Teacher School: A Disappearing Institution, by the U.S. Department of Education (Hughes, 1986) documents the decline of one-teacher schools from 75,000 in 1948 to 798 in 1983. Similarly, Egerton (1967) documents the decline of one-room schools in the southeastern United States. Egerton also reviewed the disadvantages of these schools and believes that successful consolidation will decrease the sentimental longing for the one-room school.

Methodolgy

Information for this study was gathered in two ways: a literature review and a survey of each state department of education. The survey of each department of education (except Pennsylvania) was conducted in July and August of 1987. The questionnaire requested information on the number of public and private one-room schools in that state in 1985, 1986, and 1987. For this survey a one-room school was defined as a school with one teacher for grades 1 - 8. The questionnaire also requested historical data from 1900 and 1950 as well as the last year a

public one-room school was in operation in that state. States which did not reply to the first survey were mailed another questionnaire in the Fall of 1987. Surveys were returned by 47 of the 49 states. Information for two states that did not reply was obtained from Freeman (1986). Information for Pennsylvania was obtained from a review of State Department records by the researcher. Information on the number of Amish and Old Order Mennonite one-room schools was obtained from the Blackboard Buletin (1987) and (1988).

Results

A summary of the survey of each State Department of Education and review of literature is presented in Table 1. The data for the table was obtained from the survey of each State Department of Education and from Freeman (1986). The first column of data indicates the number of one-room schools in that state in 1950. Twenty-six of the 50 states did not have this information on record. The last column, headed Final Year, indicates the last year a public one-room school was in operation in that state. Seven of the states were not able to obtain this information. One should note that the data for the states of Alaska, Arizona, Idaho, Minnesota, and Ohio were obtained from Freeman (1986).

Insert Table 1 about here

It is interesting to note that 80% of the public one-room

schools in 1987 were found in states west of the Mississippi River and that there were only five public one-room schools in the southeastern states. While several state education departments were unable to supply the data for this survey, the state of Washington has a 16-page report entitled, One Room Schools in Washington State (1981), which provides extensive information on each public one-room school in the state.

Table 2 indicates the total number of private one-room schools in the U.S. during 1987. This data was obtained from the survey of State Departments of Education and The Blackboard Bulletin. This table indicates that 68% of the private one-room schools in the United States are Amish. Furthermore, 520 or 80% of the private one-room schools in the United States are Amish or Old Order Mennonite.

Insert Table 2 about here

One should note that data for some states indicates additional information on the number of other types of Amish or Old Order Mennonite schools in the state. For example, the information for Delaware is 9(2), this indicates that there are nine Amish one-room schools and that there are also two other Amish schools with two or more teachers. Most Amish schools in the midwestern states of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio usually have two classes and two teachers per school. Most of these types of schools use methods found in one-room schools. Thirty-eight of the 47 state education departments responding to the

survey did not have information concerning private one-room schools. Pennsylvania ranked first in the number of private one-room schools with 256 while Ohio was second with 84 schools.

Table 3 indicates the total number of public and private one-room schools in the U.S. from 1930 to 1987. The data reveal a rapid decline in the total number of one-room schools from 1930 to 1971. However, the opposite is ocurring with the growth of the private Amish and Mennonite one-room schools. This growth which was 21 new schools per year from 1981 - 1988, has served to stablilize the total number of one-room schools in the United States during that time period. For example, in 1971 Amish and Old Order Mennonite schools accounted for only 10% of the one-room schools in the United States, however, by 1987 they accounted for 41% of the one-room schools.

Insert Table 3 about here

Table 3 also illustrates the rapid decline of the public one-room schools from 1950 to 1971. The approximate rate of decline was 2% from 1930 - 1940, 5% from 1940 - 1950, 9% from 1950 - 1960, 8% from 1960 - 1971, 5% from 1971 - 1981 and 5% from 1981 - 1987.

A compilation of the number of public and private one-room schools by states is located in Table 4. States which are not

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Insert Table 4 about here

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listed have no known public or private one-room schools. In 1987 Nebraska ranked first in total number of one-room schools with 322. Pennsylvania was second with 257 and Montana ranked third with 111. South Dakota was fourth with 94 and Ohio ranked fifth with 84.

Discussion

There were 749 public one-room schools in operation in 1985, 715 in 1986, and 674 in 1987. While the number of public one-room schools continues to decline this decline is not as rapid as in earlier decades. The opposite trend has occurred with Amish and Old Order Mennonite Schools. The 1972 Supreme Court decision which guaranteed the Amish the right to form their own schools and to limit school based education to eight grades has had a dramatic impact on the proliferation of these schools. For example, in 1958 there were 12 of these schools, in 1974 there were 476, and in 1988 there were 537. As public school districts moved to consolidate school buildings and remove one-room schools from operation, Amish and Mennonite groups have formed their own one-room schools. Amish and Old Order Mennonite one-room schools have experienced rapid growth in states such as Pennsylvania and Ohio.

The Education Digest used the heading, "Can They Be Eliminated?" for the article "One Teacher Schools are Still Around". Data from this study reveal that one-room schools will be around for the foreseeable future. The data indicate that the rate of decline in the number of public one-room schools has declined from a 9% reduction in the 1950's to a 5% reduction in

the 1980's. Most of the public one-room schools operating today are in the western United States where the low population density makes the one-room school a logical school organizational pattern. Amish and Old Order Mennonite Schools will continue to grow as their school age population increases. Thus, the one-room school which many believe to be the education setting of the past will remain a viable alternative to consolidated schools in the next decade.

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Table 1
Number of Public One-room Schools by State

State	1950	1985	1986	1987	Final Year
Alabama	814	0	0	0	1973
Alaska	ND	24 a	ND(20)	ND(20)	
Arizona	ND	10 a	ND(10)	ND(10)	
Arkansas	0	0	0	0	1949
California	ND	41	41	41	
Colorado	561 b	6	6	6	
Connecticut	50 b	0	0	0	1954
Delaware	ND	0	0	0	1968
Florida	ND	0	0	0	
Georgia	ND	0	0	0	1966
Hawaii	0	0	0	0	ND
Idaho	ND	12 a	ND(12)	ND(12)	
Illinois	2375	4	3	2	
Indiana	267	0	0	0	1965
Iowa	ND	0	0	0	1966
Kansas	2528	1	1	1	
Kentucky	2999	1	1	1	
Louisiana	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
Maine	676	10	10	10	
Maryland	127	1	1	1	
Massachusetts	ND	1	1	1	
Michigan	ND	20	ND(18)	ND(16)	
Minnesota	ND	0 a	ND	ND	ND
Mississippi	136	1	1	1	
Missouri	ND	0	0	0	1980
Montana	ND	110	110	110	
Nebraska	4248	316	299	264	
Nevada	ND	11	11	11	
New Hampshire	ND	5	5	5	
New Jersey	ND	0	0	0	ND
New Mexico	144	4	5	4	
New York	10	3	3	3	
North Carolina	408	0	0	0	1967
North Dakota	ND	12	10	9	
Ohio	253	1 a	ND	ND	
Oklahoma	ND	ND	ND	0	ND
Oregon	225	18	18	17	
Pennsylvania	2493	1	1	1	
Rhode Island	ND	0	0	0	ND
South Carolina	ND	1	2	2	
South Dakota	3065	87	80	80	
Tennesse	1744	0	0	0	1983
Texas	ND	3	3	3	
Utah	ND	3	3	3	
Vermont	ND	6	6	5	
Virginia	985	0	0	0	ND
Washington	127	8	8	8	
West Virginia	ND	1	1	0	1986
Wisconsin	3797	0	0	0	1970
Wyoming	ND	25	25	27	
Total		749	715	674	

a = data from Freeman (1986)
b = estimated by that State Department of Education
ND = no data kept by that State Department of Education
( ) = estimated by researcher from 1985 data

Table 2

Private One-room Schools by States (1987)

State	Amish	Old Order Mennonite	Other	Total
Arkansas	1			1
Delaware	9(2)			9
Illinois	1(8)			1
Indiana	13(68)	1(5)		14
Iowa	18(7)			18
Kansas			7	7
Kentucky	5(3)	3(1)		8
Maryland	5	1		6
Michigan	17(5)			17
Minnesota	11			11
Missouri	25(10)	12(1)		37
Montana	(1)			
Nebraska			58	58
New Hampshire			5	5
New York	20(9)	4(3)		24
Ohio	83(64)	1(3)		84
Oklahoma	1			1
Pennsylvania	184(16)	72(20)		256
S. Carolina			1	1
S. Dakota			14	14
Tennessee	5(2)	1		6
Virginia		0(5)		0
Wisconsin	24(11)	3		27
Total	422	98	85	605

Note: All information for Amish and Old Order Mennonite one-room schools was obtained from the December 1987 issue of The Blackboard Bulletin. The numbers in ( ) indicate the number of other Amish or Mennonite schools which have two or more teachers.

Table 3

Total One-room Schools in the United States

Year	Public	Amish or Old Order Mennonite	Other Private	Total
1930	149,282 a	0		149,282
1940	113,600 a	4		113,604
1950	59,652 a	12		59,664
1960	20,213 a	71		20,284
1971	1,815 a	195		2,010
1981	921 a	384		1,305
1984	838 a	467		1,305
1985	749	481	93	1,323
1986	715	497	91	1,303
1987	675	520	85	1,280
1988		537		

Note: a = One teacher schools (Snyder, 1987). Data for Amish and Old Order Mennonite Schools was obtained from the December, 1987 and November, 1988 issue of The Blackboard Bulletin. Data for private one-room schools from 1930-1984 was not requested.

Table 4

Number of Public and Private One-room Schools by State (1987)

State	Public	Private	Total
Alaska	20	ND	20
Arizona	10	ND	10
Arkansas	0	1	1
California	41	0	41
Colorado	6	ND	6
Delaware	0	9	9
Idaho	12	ND	12
Illinois	2	ND	2
Indiana	0	14	14
Iowa	0	18	18
Kansas	1	7	8
Kentucky	1	8	9
Maine	10	0	10
Maryland	1	6	7
Massachusetts	1	ND	1
Michigan	16	17	33
Minnesota	0	11	11
Mississippi	1	ND	1
Missouri	0	37	37
Montana	110	1	111
Nebraska	264	58	322
Nevada	11	ND	11
New Hampshire	5	5	10
New Mexico	4	ND	4
New York	3	24	27
North Dakota	9	0	9
Ohio	ND	84	84
Oklahoma	0	1	1
Oregon	17	ND	17
Pennsylvania	1	256	257
South Carolina	2	1	3
South Dakota	80	14	94
Tennesse	0	6	6
Texas	3	ND	3
Utah	3	0	3
Vermont	5	ND	5
Washington	8	ND	8
Wisconsin	0	27	27
Wyoming	27	ND	27
Total	674	605	1279

Note: ND = no data kept by that State Department of Education.

The eleven states not listed report no public or private one-room schools.